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A

SERMON,

PREACHED DEC. 13, 1826,

AT

THE INSTALLATION

OF THE

REV. CALVIN PARK, D. D.

IN THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

IN

STOUGHTON.

BY NATHANAEL EMMONS, D. D.

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SERMON.

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Jeremiah, xxiii. 28.

The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully: What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord.

In Jeremiah's day, there were many false teachers, who presumed to preach their own dreams and delusions, under pretence of preaching divine truth. This was highly displeasing to God, who first reproves such deceivers for their criminal presumption; and then admonishes those whom he had actually authorized to speak his word, to speak it faithfully. "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully: What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord." What was called *prophesying* under the Old Testament, is called *preaching* under the New. Noah was a *prophet* and preacher. And the Apostle uses the term *prophesying*, to denote *preach-*

ing. The spirit of the text, therefore, warrants us to say,

That every minister ought to preach the word of God faithfully. To illustrate this plain and practical subject, I shall first explain this ministerial duty; and then enforce the practice of it.

In pursuing the method proposed, I can hardly fail of saying the same things, which have often been said, and often been better said before; but which, those who give and receive religious instruction can scarcely hear too often. To preach the word of God faithfully implies,

1. That a minister understands it. This is suggested in the text. "He that *hath* my word, let him speak my word faithfully." By having the word of God, is meant having the knowledge of it, in distinction from having a dream, or a mere imaginary idea of divine truth. It is impossible, that a minister should preach the word of God faithfully without knowing what it is. Could the Apostles, who were sent into the world to preach the gospel, have fulfilled their duty, if they had not understood the gospel, which they were commanded to preach? The word of God contains a complete system of religion, which is entirely different from every false scheme ever devised by man. To preach the word of God, is to explain and inculcate the very scheme of religion, which he has *revealed*, and which never could have been known had he not revealed it.

But who can do this, without understanding what he has revealed? It is true, that a perfect knowledge of every text in the Bible, is not necessary in order to preach the word of God faithfully. No man does, nor perhaps ever will possess such a universal and perfect knowledge of the Scriptures. But yet a clear, a just, and general knowledge of the first principles of the Oracles of God, is necessary to qualify a preacher for the faithful discharge of his duty. A novice, who is unskilful in the word of righteousness, is expressly forbidden to preach the gospel. Ministers must have the word of God in their understandings as well as in their hearts, in order to be able and faithful instructers of the doctrines and duties of Christianity.

2. They must not only understand the word of God, but *know* that they understand it. "He that hath a dream, saith the Lord, let him tell a *dream*, and not pretend it is *my word;* and he that hath *my word*, let him speak *my word*, and speak it as *mine*, and not as *his own*." But if ministers do not *know*, that they understand the word of God, how can they with propriety and sincerity, preach his word as *his word?* To do this would be daring presumption. There is, however, no occasion of their ever being guilty of this presumption; for if they do understand the word of God, they may *know*, that they understand it. The Bible contains a plain and consistent system of divine truths, which have a plain, consistent, and important meaning. This is true of the Scriptures in general, and of detached passages in

particular. So that those, who search the writings of the inspired penmen, with attention and impartiality, may know the mind of God in respect to the great and essential doctrines of the gospel. To suppose the contrary, is to suppose that the Bible is a *sealed* book, and of no use to those, for whose spiritual and eternal good it was designed. It must be allowed, then, that ministers *may understand* the word of God, and may *know*, that they understand it. It is true, that a man may know a certain truth, and yet not know that he knows it; but the reason is, that he does not see the whole *evidence* which supports it. But the preachers of the gospel should have such a clear and extensive knowledge of the evidences in support of the gospel and of what it contains, as to know that they understand it. The primitive preachers of the gospel *knew* that they *knew*, not only the *inspiration* but the *doctrines* of the gospel. They could say, "We believe, and therefore speak." They could confidently declare, that they did not preach cunningly devised fables. Paul could assure his hearers, that "he did not come to them with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, but declaring the *testimony of God;* for he determined to know nothing among them, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." If ministers do not understand, and *know* that they understand the gospel, how can they preach the preaching which God bids them? or how can they be faithful to God, or to their people, or to themselves? He that hath a dream may tell a dream; but he that does not know, that he knows the word

of God, cannot preach it faithfully as the word of God.

3. Fidelity requires ministers to preach the word of God *fully*. No other book has been so often and so grossly curtailed, distorted, and perverted as the Bible. It has been read, criticised, explained, and preached upon, in a detached and desultory manner, without a due regard to its connexion and harmony, which runs through the whole. But fidelity requires ministers to preach the word of God fully, and lay open the great system of doctrines contained in it. The Apostle Paul declares, that he did not preach the gospel in a partial and superficial manner, nor shun to declare the whole counsel of God. And if we look into his epistles, we shall find, that he developed the great plan of salvation, as devised by God the Father; as executed by God the Son; and as applied by God the Holy Ghost. He explained the distinct offices and operations of the ever blessed Trinity, in creating, redeeming, and governing the world. Of course, he taught the doctrine of divine decrees; the doctrine of human depravity; the doctrine of vicarious atonement; and the doctrine of divine agency in preparing all mankind for their future and final destination. It is difficult to see how ministers can preach the word of God faithfully, unless they preach it in such a full and comprehensive manner. Though they should preach upon every text in the Bible; yet if they should omit, or but cursorily mention the primary truths of the gospel, they would not preach it fully. God is to be clearly and justly seen

and known only in the face of Jesus Christ. No part of his character and no part of his conduct can be properly understood, or described, detached from his ultimate end in the creation and redemption of the world. If the word of God itself be profitable, then all its doctrines and duties are profitable; and ought to be explained and inculcated in their nature, connexion, extent, and importance. It is strange, indeed, that any suppose, that the best way of preaching the gospel, is to inculcate its duties, and pass over its doctrines in silence. This is so far from preaching the whole gospel, that it is not preaching half of it; nor even any part of it. There can be no gospel duties detached from gospel doctrines. It is, therefore, the indispensable duty of ministers to exhibit the whole gospel, and illustrate as fully as possible all its doctrines and duties in their proper order, connexion, and full extent.

4. They must preach the word of God *plainly* as well as *fully*. It is more difficult as well as more important to preach plainly, than many are apt to imagine. They should always preach so as to be understood; but they cannot be understood by the great majority of their hearers, unless they use proper words, arranged in their usual, natural, and proper order. The language of the sacred writers is at once pure, simple, energetic, and plain to the least, and pleasing to the most cultivated minds. Christ preached as he conversed, with peculiar perspicuity. Paul imitated his example. He said, he had rather speak five words which were easy to be understood

and edifying to common christians, than ten thousand which they could not understand and which could do them no good. But there is a plainness of *method*, as well as of *language*, which is necessary, in order to preach instructively and faithfully. Preachers may use plain words, and yet throw their thoughts and sentiments together in such a desultory and irregular manner, that it will be very difficult for any to catch their meaning. No man can speak intelligibly to any audience, without previously proposing in his own mind, some definite subject, and some definite mode of treating it. Though Fenelon and some other celebrated writers on public speaking, recommend a *concealed method*, and reprobate the practice of mentioning the leading topics and general divisions of a discourse ; yet this seems calculated to excite attention, more than to convey instruction. The perspicuity or transparency of a discourse principally depends upon a lucid order and natural arrangement of ideas. And for this reason, it seems proper that the preacher should expressly mention his main design, and the method in which he intends to accomplish it. This will greatly assist his hearers in *understanding* and *retaining* his discourse. Allowing Fenelon to be correct in representing the whole business of the preacher to consist, in *proving*, *painting*, and *moving the passions ;* still the best way to effect all these purposes in the same discourse, is to divide it naturally, and to mention the heads distinctly. This is evidently the best method in a *didactic* discourse. And when a subject is

of a more *practical nature*, it is no less necessary to observe a strict order and connexion through the whole. It is a question whether it ever be proper to *neglect* or *conceal* a method in treating upon any subject whatever, since every subject ought to be treated plainly and instructively. There is no point, perhaps, in which preachers are more apt to fail, especially at the present day, than in the want of perspicuity. Some seem fond of preaching immethodically, that they may more smoothly and imperceptibly pass over, or but slightly touch upon the most important doctrines of the gospel, which require explanation and proof. Such superficial preaching is better suited to please than to instruct. But Paul avoided all art and disguise in preaching. "*We* have, says he, renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, *but by manifestation of the truth* commending ourselves to every man's *conscience* in the sight of God." So that, as he adds, "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." This example, all will follow, who mean to preach the gospel plainly and faithfully, for their own sake, and for the good of their people.

5. Fidelity requires ministers to preach the gospel in its *purity* and *simplicity*. They have no right to mix their own crude and unfounded opinions with the revealed truths, which they are commanded to deliver. The teachers under the law were addicted to corrupt the pure word of God, by their idle dreams and vain conceits. This is plainly intimated in the

text. " He that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully: what is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord." Truth mixed with error, is like wheat mixed with chaff; and every one knows that wheat is totally unfit for use until it is separated from the chaff. Truth mixed with error, is often more dangerous, than mere error alone. There was nothing which Christ more severely reproved the Scribes and Pharisees for, than their mixing truth with error in their false glosses and gross perversion of Scripture. They explained away the important truths of the Bible, and palmed their own dreams and imaginations upon the minds of the people, instead of teaching the pure commandments of God. Soon after Christian churches were planted, there arose false teachers, who mixed the absurd opinions of the heathen philosophers with the pure doctrines of Christianity. This gave occasion to the Apostle to exhort Timothy and Titus, " Not to give heed to fables and endless genealogies; but to shun profane and vain babblings and opposition of science, falsely so called." The same practice of corrupting the word of God, still continues and prevails in the Christian world. How many set up reason as their infallible guide in explaining Scripture, and doubt or deny every doctrine, which they imagine does not agree with that false standard? Upon this ground they deny the doctrine of the sacred Trinity, the doctrine of Christ's divine nature, the doctrine of the divine decrees, the doctrine of atonement, the doctrine of special grace

in the renovation of the heart, and many other plain, scripture doctrines. But Paul vindicates himself and the other Apostles from thus corrupting the gospel. "We are not as many who corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ." It is essential to fidelity in preaching divine truths, to preach them in their primitive purity and simplicity, as they lie in the word of God, without disguising, obscuring, or explaining them away.

6. It belongs to the office of those who preach the word of God, to defend it against its open enemies. The gospel has never failed to meet with opposition from men of corrupt minds. It is the part of faithful ministers to guard it against the attacks of its most bold and subtile opposers. They are set for the defence of the gospel; and charged, "in meekness to instruct those who oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." And "to hold fast the faithful word, that by sound doctrine, they may both exhort and convince gain-sayers, whose mouths must be stopped." It is the duty of private christians, and much more of ministers, "to contend earnestly for the *faith*, which was once delivered unto the saints." A great part of the preaching of the prophets, and of Christ's preaching, was pointed against those who maintained and propagated false doctrines. Paul preached with great plainness and severity against the enemies and perverters of the gospel. "I marvel, says he to the Galatians, that ye are so soon

removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, let him be accursed." It is as necessary, that preachers should oppose error, as that they should explain and inculcate truth. And therefore fidelity requires them to defend the gospel against all the prejudices, objections, and opposition of gain-sayers, and against all the artifices and sophistical reasonings of those, who lie in wait to deceive. I must add,

7. That the faithful preaching of the gospel necessarily includes godly sincerity. It has pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe. He employs ministers as instruments to carry on his gracious purpose. They cannot be faithful in their work, unless they sincerely seek the great end, which he is seeking by their ministry. The Apostles possessed that pure, disinterested love to God and man, which the gospel they preached enjoined and inspired. "For, say they, we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your *servants* for Jesus' sake." And, "as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God, who trieth our hearts." Every preacher ought feelingly to say, what Paul says of himself. "Though I speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass,

or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all knowledge and all mysteries; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." Christ requires those to love him supremely, whom he employs to feed his sheep and lambs.

I now proceed as proposed,

II. To enforce the practice of that ministerial fidelity, which has been explained.

1. In the first place, God expressly commands those who preach his word to be faithful in the discharge of their duty. "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully: What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord." When he sent Jeremiah to deliver his messages to his people, he said, "Gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them *all that I command thee:* be not dismayed at their faces, *lest I confound thee before them.*" He said to Ezekiel, whom he sent to the same people, "Thou shalt speak *my words* unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear." Our Lord after his resurrection, addressed his Apostles, and through them all succeeding ministers of the gospel, in these ever memorable words: "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe *all things* whatsoever I have commanded you." Paul solemnly enjoins it

upon Timothy *to be faithful* in his ministerial office. "I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine." The commands which God has laid upon his ministers to preach his word faithfully, are clothed with infinite authority, which they cannot disobey, without exposing themselves to the just displeasure of their supreme and final Judge.

In the next place, it concerns them to consider, that they have solemnly bound themselves to be *faithful* in their sacred office. They have publicly professed before the world, that they desire the office of a bishop, and to have the gospel committed to their trust. By accepting this trust, they have laid themselves under peculiar obligations to be *faithful* stewards of the mysteries of God. Having vowed to the Lord, they have no right to go back. They have pledged themselves to preach the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. If they feed their people with chaff, instead of wheat, they cannot fail of feeling the insupportable pains of self-inconsistency, self-reproach, and self-condemnation. But it must be further observed, in the last place,

That faithful preaching has a tendency to *save*, but unfaithful preaching has a tendency to *destroy*, the souls of men. God himself expressly declares this to be true. Speaking of the false prophets, he says, "If they had stood in *my counsel*, and had

caused my people to hear *my words*, then should they have *turned* them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings—Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams—therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord." If ministers preach the word of God faithfully, they may hope to be instrumental of their salvation; but if they are unfaithful, and teach them error, instead of truth, they may expect to be instrumental of involving them in stupidity, delusion, and endless ruin. They are under the most solemn responsibility to God, and to their people, whose souls are committed to their charge, and whose eternal interests, are in a measure suspended upon their faithfulness, or unfaithfulness. But if they are faithful, they may adopt the grateful and triumphant language of the Apostle, "Now thanks be unto God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ; and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ in them that are saved, and in them that perish." Such are the solemn and weighty motives to ministerial fidelity.

It now remains to improve the subject.

1. If preaching the gospel faithfully include so much as has been represented; then ministers have a very arduous and laborious work to perform. This I know is generally allowed, but not so generally believed. Not a few are ready to imagine, and sometimes apt to say, that ministers have an easy task, and live an idle life. But neither of these things is

true of faithful ministers. If they must understand the gospel; if they must know that they understand it; if they must preach it plainly and extensively; if they must preach it in its purity, without any mixture of error; if they must preach it defensively and sincerely; then their work is not only important to themselves and others, but extremely arduous and laborious. It requires much reading, and much thinking, to acquire that knowledge of the gospel, and that knowledge of the human heart, and that knowledge of the various ways of preaching and affecting the human heart, which is necessary, in order to preach plainly, instructively, and impressively. Though the Bible affords them abundant matter for their discourses on both common and uncommon occasions; yet it is very laborious to select, arrange, and express divine truths in a proper manner. Invention is the highest effort of the human mind; and no persons have more frequent occasion for the exercise of this mental faculty, than preachers of the gospel, in order to find *new* subjects of discourse, and *new* modes of treating them. It is easy for him that has a dream to tell a dream. It is easy to preach superficially *about* the Bible and the doctrines of the Bible; but it is far from being so, to bring forth things new and old out of that treasury, and to feed a people with knowledge and understanding. Many imagine it is an easy thing to preach; and to this it is owing that we have such a multitude of preachers at the present day. It is, however, very difficult and laborious to preach well, as all able and

faithful ministers find to be true by actual experience. But besides preaching, they have a vast many pastoral services to perform, which require the exercise of all their wisdom, prudence, zeal, and self-denial. These are greater trials, as a French author justly observes, than any other professional men, are called to endure. In a word, the public and private services of faithful ministers are extremely laborious, and more than enough to employ all their time and all their abilities.

2. If ministers are bound to preach the truth and the whole truth faithfully; then they are bound to preach against every species of error, whether in principle or practice. They are set as watchmen to espy danger, and warn their people against it. If they discover any propagating false and dangerous principles, it is their indispensable duty to expose and refute such errors and delusions, and to warn their people against them, without fear or favour of the propagators, whether they are atheists, sceptics, deists, unitarians, arminians, methodists, antinomians, or universalists. Or if they find any who appear to be deceiving themselves, by fixing their hopes of future happiness upon a false and dangerous foundation, it is no less necessary to deal plainly and faithfully with them, and if possible, to convince them of their error, and persuade them to embrace the truth. Fidelity requires the discharge of these duties, which are extremely difficult to perform, without giving offence; for few can patiently bear to have the soundness of their understanding, or the

goodness of their heart called in question, or the ground of their spiritual hopes taken away. But if watchmen on the walls of Zion mean to be faithful, they must set their face as a flint, and boldly combat the powers of darkness, and the corruptions of human nature. Jeremiah delivered the divine messages faithfully, though it exposed him to the general reproach of the guilty.

3. If ministers are bound to preach the word of God faithfully; then they can have *no excuse* for being unfaithful. Their obligations to fidelity are superior to all the reasons they can possibly urge in excuse for unfaithfulness.

If they plead *ignorance* for *not* preaching some truths, or for preaching some errors; this will not excuse them. For they are bound to *know* the truth, and to *know* that they know it. Therefore they must be inexcusable for preaching what they do *not* know; and for *not* preaching what they do know.

If they plead, that fidelity would injure their personal interest; this will not excuse them for unfaithfulness. For they have no right to employ their time, or strength, or talents, in pursuing any business or promoting any interest, that is inconsistent with the work of the ministry, which they have solemnly engaged to perform faithfully.

If they plead opposition to the truth; this will not excuse them for neglecting to preach it. It is their duty to disregard or overcome opposition, and to continue preaching the truth, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear.

The commands of God, their own engagements, the cause of Christ, and the salvation of souls, create obligations to fidelity, paramount to all possible excuses for unfaithfulness, in the sight of God and man.

4. If ministers are bound to preach the word of God faithfully; then they ought not to be afraid to preach it faithfully. Their greatest danger lies in *neglecting*, and not in *doing* their duty. The word which they preach is the *sword* of the Spirit, and if rightly wielded can disarm the enemies of truth: So long as they preach the truth in love, they may safely confide in the promised presence and protection of Christ. But if they are unfaithful, they have just reason to fear; for this will arm both God and man against them. Though they may expect, that impenitent sinners and back-sliding christians will be offended, if they preach plainly, and reprove, rebuke, and exhort them faithfully; yet the *frowns* of such persons are better than their *smiles*, and less to be feared. For their *disapprobation* will sooner or later turn into *approbation*. They will be constrained to *approve* of that faithfulness, which was intended and calculated to promote their highest good. Many such instances have been known under the faithful preaching of the gospel. When the enemies of the truth become cordially reconciled to it, they never fail to be reconciled to those who plainly and faithfully preach it. But if they cannot gain the approbation of their hearts, they may gain the approbation of their consciences in favour of their faithful-

ness, by putting this pointed question to them, "Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, *judge ye.*" Fidelity to God, will banish the fear of man, which bringeth a snare. Let us, therefore, my Brethren, make the Lord himself our fear and our dread; and then we may hope, that his grace will be sufficient for us, and his strength be made perfect in our weakness; and through his strengthening us, we may do all that he has commanded us.

Finally, the whole current of this discourse naturally leads us to believe, that God highly favours those to whom he sends able and faithful Ministers. They are the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and one of the richest blessings he ever bestowed upon mankind. As such he esteems them and promises to give them to his people. "I will give you Pastors according to my heart, who shall feed you with knowledge and understanding." Wherever God sends his faithful ministers, there is ground to hope, that he will be with them, assist them in their great and good work, and crown their labours with desired success. Though he has lately called away from this Church and religious Society a faithful Minister as we suppose; yet he has not forgotten nor forsaken them, for he is this day about to send them a Pastor, whose piety, ability, and fidelity, have been long known and highly esteemed. He is opening a bright and promising prospect before the eyes of this little flock, and providentially indicating his gracious design, that they shall not suffer

a famine of the word; but shall be guided, comforted, and instructed by one, who shall rightly divide the word of truth, and bring out of his treasure things new and old. They have, therefore, peculiar reason to rejoice on this auspicious occasion, and to hope that they shall see good days, according to the days in which they have seen evil. But it behoves them to remember, that to whom *much* has been given, of them *much* will be required.